

# DHS Matters!

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Submit stories by e-mail to [DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov](mailto:DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov)

## Record turnout at Barry-Eaton foster family appreciation banquet

By Suzanne Stiles Burke, Foster Care Licensing Supervisor  
Barry-Eaton DHS, Charlotte

[BurkeS2@michigan.gov](mailto:BurkeS2@michigan.gov)

The Children's Services staff of Barry-Eaton DHS honored their foster families at the annual Foster Family Appreciation and Awards Banquet held May 23 at the Charlotte Assembly of God Church. More than 170 parents, children, and guests were in attendance to enjoy excellent food, children's activities, awards, and door prizes.

Tables were decorated with garden centerpieces that included pots of flowers, seed packets of sunflowers and forget-me-nots with live orchids and hanging pots of impatiens, violets, and mums decorating the stage. The banquet theme, "Planting a Seed", was reflected in post-dinner speeches about positive influences from childhood.

Barry-Eaton Department of Human Services director [Don Rewa](#) and Family Court judges, the Hon. Michael Skinner of Eaton County and the Hon. William Doherty of Barry County, recognized foster parents for planting seeds of love and encouragement that may continue to grow and inspire for a lifetime in the hearts and minds of the children they foster.

Following the dinner and speeches, a number of certificates and plaques were presented, including:

- Mentorship awards to individuals who offered exceptional guidance and support to newly licensed families.
- Family to Family award to the family who best embodied the Family to Family principle of collaboration with birth families.
- Foster Parents of the Year awards.

The evening closed with a drawing for the flowers and the many door prizes and gifts donated by the Barry/Eaton communities.

## Today's big story



Attending the Barry-Eaton foster care event (left to right): Eaton County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Neil O'Brien, Eaton County children's protective services specialist [Alli McDowell](#), Barry-Eaton County adoption specialist [Katie Schrock](#), Barry County Family Court Judge William Doherty, Eaton County Family Court Judge Michael Skinner, Jaden Sutton and parents, foster care-juvenile justice specialists [Jemar Sutton](#) and [Stacey Bower](#).

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## May was Foster Care Month in Michigan

Events around the state celebrated May as Foster Care Month in Michigan again this year. The national theme was "Change a lifetime". Among this year's events – aside from the celebration above – were these:



- The annual foster parent rally was held at the state Capitol building in Lansing May 9.
- A 5K run in Kalamazoo to benefit foster children.
- A May 25 event in Detroit highlighting the need for mentors for foster children.

"In Michigan there are more than 20,000 children and youths in foster care who are being provided a safe, secure and stable home environment along with the compassion and nurturing of a foster family," said Gov. Jennifer Granholm's proclamation declaring May as Foster Care Month. "Foster families open their homes and hearts to children whose families are in crisis (and) they play a pivotal role in helping children and families heal, reconnect and launch children into successful adulthood."

## Linked for Learning at Family Resource Center in Flint

By Michelle Chockley, Family Independence Manager  
Genesee County DHS, Flint  
[ChockleyM@michigan.gov](mailto:ChockleyM@michigan.gov)

All of the 600 children at Washington Elementary gathered in the gym on April 6 to watch a demonstration of **Linked for Learning** which was being presented for their guests who included Lt. Governor John Cherry and other community leaders.

**Linked for Learning** allows teachers to do classroom instruction with the student's feedback coming back directly to the teacher on the computer - putting technology in the hands of students. The responses are identified with the student's name and the teacher can then use this information for further discussion and to develop curriculums.



With **Linked for Learning** students have also learned how to do surveys, research, word processing, power points and more. The C.S. Mott Foundation in partnership with University of Michigan-Flint outreach fund this model.

When the children were asked, "Who likes computers?" every hand flew into the air. The atmosphere was filled with the chant, "Let's get linked!", "Let's get linked!"

First the children heard from Gov. Jennifer Granholm via a videotaped message (photo above). Granholm told the Washington children they were the key to Michigan's future and needed to learn as much as they can, especially about technology.

Lt. Gov. Cherry, a Flint native, explained to the children that **Linked for Learning** was a result of Gov. Granholm asking what this community needed.

After the demonstration, Washington Elementary sent an email to the governor. They received a response from the governor, saying how proud she is of the students and to keep up the good work! It is hoped that this model will soon be available statewide.



During March, employees from the **Saginaw County Department of Human Services** office donated 26 laundry baskets full of household, personal hygiene items and Easter goodies which were then given to the local Underground Railroad to be distributed for Easter. Underground Railroad is a shelter for battered women and children in Saginaw.  
— from **Brenda Will**

## Racing to read in Gratiot County

From Louise Wing, Program Manager  
Ionia County DHS, Ionia  
[WingL@michigan.gov](mailto:WingL@michigan.gov)

March was Reading Month and Fulton Elementary School in Middleton (Gratiot County) chose "Racing to Read" as their theme for this year. One of the teachers, Mrs. Nevins, knew they had a local racing legend in the neighborhood, so she asked him if he would bring his race cars to school and talk to the K-6 grades about racing and reading. Roger Wing, my husband, said "Of course!" Roger was inducted into the Michigan Motorsports Hall of Fame in 2004. He has been racing for 34 years and has many championships at several different dirt and asphalt tracks.

On March 21 Roger and Louise brought a dirt race car and an asphalt race car over to the school parking lot, and the kids came out in groups all day long. Roger and Louise told the kids that they needed to be able to read so they could earn a living to be able to go racing, read racing manuals, read racing schedules, and read the internet to see what other racers were doing. The most often heard quote from the kids was, "Awesome!"



Roger and Louise Wing with the school kids and one of the race cars they brought to Fulton Elementary School.





(Above) Berrien County DHS administrators, managers, and supervisors provided lunch to recognize the outstanding contributions of all of the administrative support staff on April 27. The administrative support staff in Berrien County are an integral and essential part of the customer service provided by our agency. – from Lee Stults



In celebration of our Hispanic friends and neighbors on “Cinco de Mayo” May 5, the Oceana County DHS office hosted a potluck luncheon and many dressed in traditional cultural clothing. Here, family independence manager Julian Castillo helps celebrate the festive event where a tasty luncheon was enjoyed by all.  
– from Walt Bogus



**Note:** Sometimes considered the informal Mexican Independence Day, Cinco de Mayo commemorates a May 5, 1862 battle where 4,000 Mexican soldiers defeated a French & Mexican army of 8,000 near Puebla, located 100 miles east of Mexico City.

## Take your daughters and sons to work day

By Pat Ostrander and Diane Szymas  
Kent County DHS, Grand Rapids  
[SchoenM@michigan.gov](mailto:SchoenM@michigan.gov)

The Kent County Department of Human Services participated in “Take Your Daughters and Sons to Work Day” April 28 where three organized events were planned for the 32 girls and 26 boys who attended. The children were greeted with a welcoming speech from our district manager, [Kathy Greiner](#) and were separated into groups by ages for activities.

The first activity was a Reality Store that provided the children with an educational opportunity to experience some of life's realities. It started with a Family Determination where the children selected a career and determined, by dice throw, their marital and parental status. They stopped at 14 different booths with two employees each and experienced many challenges by using a check register to keep track of their monthly expenses. They experienced first-hand how far their money went. From their monthly wages they had to do their banking, pay taxes, housing expenses, pay for utilities, buy groceries, pay day care expenses, transportation costs, insurance - including medical, home and auto, pay for clothing, personal care items, savings and investments.

The second activity was a survival game where children were divided into teams and given a scenario such as a boat trip shipwrecked on an island, a plane crash in a jungle, or hiking in the mountains and the tour guide is lost. Each team was given a list from which they could choose five items for survival. They then discussed what items they would chose and why. Each team was also given a couple of questions about survival to discuss.

The final activity was a lesson on how to play hand bells. Family independence managers [Sharon Gardei](#) and [Doris Grant](#) play hand bells and brought in the equipment to teach the children how to play. The children had great instructors and were able to learn a song in a short period of time. When the activities were finished the children gave a recital from the song they learned. The morning ended with our director, [Andy Zylstra](#), presenting each child with a certificate of participation. After lunch the children went back to the desk of their relative and got some “hands on” experience.

**Date:** May 23  
**To:** DHS Matters!  
**Subj:** Public recognition

I wish to publicly thank a group of people who have gone out of their way to assist me following my diagnosis with breast cancer last October. The **family independence and eligibility specialist staffs in Cass County** have been so supportive and caring that it made my whole ordeal much easier to handle. They took over my intake, stood by me through three surgeries, and made me wear a hat when I went outdoors with my bald head. Words cannot express how much I appreciate the concern they showed for me during my chemotherapy and radiation and how much they continue to support me now. Two DHS people outside my office were big supports for me. As a cancer survivor himself, **Ted Pfeiffer** in Central Office dropped everything on more than one occasion to speak with me when I feared dying, as one often does when diagnosed with cancer. And **Isabel Wieczerza**, from Macomb County, has willingly shared all her experiences with breast cancer and follow-up care even though she is still receiving treatment herself. Even though doctors told me what to expect, having gone through it herself, Isabel's description of what worked best for her was invaluable in helping me deal with chemotherapy-induced side effects – so much so that I had virtually no side effects except for the baldness. Even though they were all overworked and stressed, these people went out of their way to help and support me. I think their kindness and consideration is worth more than all the gold in the world.

**Cindy Wood**

Cass County DHS, Cassopolis

■ *Ted Pfeiffer is a department analyst with DHS Child Development and Care and Isabel Wieczerza is a word processing assistant with Macomb County DHS.*

Your letters,  
intercepted  
and otherwise

**Date:** May 11  
**To:** Douglas McCombs, Director  
Alpena-Presque Isle DHS

**Subj:** Denise Penn

It is appropriate that I correspond with you regarding the excellent work of Denise Penn. She has not only provided timely reports and input to all parties, especially the Prosecutor's Office, but they are also well written and to-the-point. Specifically, her petitions for termination of parental rights are exceptional and should be emulated statewide. The process involving termination cases is complex and includes a myriad of facts. She has always organized and presented difficult information well. It is also quite obvious that Denise cares about the children and families she serves. Thank you for supporting her service to the people of the county of Alpena and the state of Michigan.

**Thomas J. LaCross**

Assistant Prosecuting Attorney

Alpena County

■ *"Denise Penn is Alpena County children's foster care specialist," said McCombs. "She, along with her coworkers and supervisor, have fashioned a great working relationship with our prosecutor and his staff. Denise definitely deserves this praise."*

**Date:** April 25  
**To:** Andy Zylstra, Director  
Kent County DHS, Grand Rapids

**Subj:** Abbey Van Hoeven

I am currently in college (and) will graduate in June 2005. From there I will be very qualified for a good paying job. The Work First program has been very instrumental in my education. They check on me often to see if I need help with anything and are very nice and helpful! Most of my success is due to my caseworker, Abbey Van Hoeven. She was very nice to me on every contact. If I called her, she always responded promptly. Abbey has a wonderful, pleasant, helpful, sincere interest in her people. From all the horror stories that circulate about your agency, I just want you to know – the system worked for me. If I were allowed I would nominate Abbey Van Hoeven as caseworker of the year.

**Kim Crissman**

Lowell

■ *Abbey Van Hoeven is a family independence specialist with Kent County DHS in Grand Rapids.*

DHS Matters! is a product of Michigan's Department of Human Services  
Marianne Udow, Director • Karen Stock, Director, Office of Communications  
Larry VanDeSande, editor • Submit stories by e-mail to: [DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov](mailto:DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov)